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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused March 18 news coverage on the ongoing investigation into former President Chen Shui-bian and his family's legal cases; on the largest-ever group of Chinese tourists to come to Taiwan; and on the island's economic prospects. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" discussed the recent confrontation between USNS Impeccable and several Chinese vessels on the South China Sea. The article called the incident "another reflection of tension between a rising China and today's hegemon, the United States." An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" criticized China for playing a two-faced strategy with Taiwan in the international community. The article urged "both the Obama administration and the rest of the international community to rethink carefully whether they really want today's 'democratic Taiwan' to turn into a province of an authoritarian PRC." End summary.

A) "Sea Incident Shows Rising Tensions"

Columnist Frank Ching wrote in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] (3/18):

"The recent incident at sea involving an American naval ship, the Impeccable, and five Chinese vessels eerily resembles the aerial incident eight years ago when an American intelligence-gathering EP-3 collided with a Chinese fighter jet, leading to an international crisis. ... The incident is another reflection of tension between a rising China and today's hegemon, the United States. It also reflects fundamental differences on international law. ...

"China is unhappy that American planes and ships can travel halfway around the world to snoop off the Chinese coast. However, one day, no doubt, China will have the ability to eavesdrop off the American coast. When that day comes, what will China do? Will it forgo that opportunity on principle because it considers such activities to be illegal? ... But another confrontation at this time is not inevitable. While China is strengthening its military, it knows that it is still no match for the United States. Wisdom dictates that the Chinese should continue to exercise patience. China can push the envelope but it doesn't want a showdown.

B) "PRC Sets Snares for Taiwan and U.S."

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (3/18):

"... [T]he PRC has resumed playing sharply divergent tunes on the 'Taiwan question' when addressing audiences in Taiwan itself or the world community after the China-friendly KMT administration of President Ma Ying-jeou took office last May. ... Actually, the smiling faces of Hu and Premier Wen Jiabao and [Foreign Minister] Yang's angry demeanor are two sides of the same coin. Both Hu and Wen combined their anticipation for cross-strait 'peace' talks with a rigid insistence on Taipei's prior acceptance of Beijing's 'one China principle' before any political negotiations and excluded any

possibility of arrangements for Taiwan's international participation that would hint of independent Taiwan or 'one Taiwan, one China' or 'two Chinas.' ...

"Although it has been Beijing's long time strategy to present separate faces toward Taiwan and international society, the underlying reality is that the current PRC regime has no intention of making any concessions such as acknowledging the existence of an independent Taiwan or 'Republic of China' or accepting the right of Taiwan's 23 million people to make their own free choice on their future. What is surprising is how both Washington and the Ma administration seem to have been so befuddled by such an obvious 'good cop, bad cop' routine and naively believe that Beijing has truly sent messages of 'goodwill' to Taiwan. Indeed, Beijing's 'moderate' rhetoric merely aims to push the Ma administration into a political trap on the WHA issue, in which the most likely 'solution' is for the PRC to 'allow' Taipei to temporarily enjoy observer status but require that Beijing and the WHA Secretariat annually review Taiwan's 'performance.'

"Moreover, the more that the Obama administration turns a blind eye to such dynamics and to Beijing's unchanged intention to annex Taiwan, the more voices among the Washington foreign policy establishment will rise in favor of not only 'peaceful resolution' of the Taiwan Strait issue but also hint that 'unification that is peaceful is also acceptable.' Such discussions should be a wake-up call to both the Obama administration and the rest of the international community to rethink carefully whether they really want today's 'democratic Taiwan' to turn into a province of an authoritarian PRC."

YOUNG